

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Making us proud: young children engaging with schooled literacy discourses

Journal Item

How to cite:

Henning, Lucy (2019). Making us proud: young children engaging with schooled literacy discourses. Cambridge Journal of Education, 49(5) pp. 637–653.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2019 University of Cambridge



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/0305764X.2019.1580348>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Abstract

In this article I take a Literacy as a Social Practice approach to explore the ways in which a class of 5 – 6 year old children in a London primary school accounted for the operation of schooled discourses of literacy. I present data from an ethnographic study which suggests that the children made demonstrations of practices expected by schooling to teaching adults in the classroom; but placed less emphasis on demonstrating other practices which, whilst helpful, did not align with schooled expectations for how children should practise literacy. This suggests that the children worked within the constraints of schooled literacy, whilst maintaining their own beliefs about how best to engage with schooled literacy tasks. An implication here is that the emphasis of schooling on ensuring children meet adult expectations may restrict educators' view of the complexity of young children's in-school literacy practices.

In this article I argue that schooled discourses of young children, schooling and literacy provide insufficient conceptual tools for understanding young children's engagement with schooled literacy tasks. To demonstrate this, I present data that shows how five-year-old children in a West London Primary School work to accommodate schooled assumptions into their literacy practices. The data shows that children in a Year 1 (age 5 – 6) class in a London primary school: a) were aware of the operation of schooled procedures of 'observation' and 'assessment'; b) made demonstrations of practices expected by schooling to adults in the classroom, in particular the teacher; and c) placed less emphasis on demonstrating literacy practices they found helpful, but were not expected by schooling, to adults. In some cases the children's behaviour suggests that they understood that success in schooled literacy tasks involved publicly emphasising particular aspects of their literacy practices, regardless of how helpful (or otherwise) they found them. This behaviour enabled the children to demonstrate alignment with schooled literacy. An implication here is that children's visible alignment with schooled expectations for their literacy practices does not necessarily mean they understand or agree with such expectations. Thus, the strategies that schools teach children for engaging with texts may not necessarily be those the children find helpful or meaningful. I argue therefore that greater attention needs to be paid to young children's active and creative engagement with being taught to read and write in school in order to understand how young children develop literacy practices in classrooms.

The literacies of schooling

In this paper I apply three theoretical perspectives to the exploration of children's engagement with schooled literacy tasks. Firstly, I understand literacy from the

perspective of Literacy as a Social Practice (hereafter LSP - cf Street 1984; Barton and Hamilton 2000, Barton 2007). From this perspective the dominant literacy found in schools is ‘school literacy’ - a particular set of assumptions and practices about literacy that is strongly related to institutions of mass schooling (cf Street and Street 1995; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000; Gregory and Williams 2000; Cook-Gumperz 2006; Barton 2007). However, LSP researchers argue that children’s in-class literacy practices may incorporate other discourses of literacy besides this dominant discourse of schooling (Bourne 2001, 2002; Maybin 2007, 2013). In this article I am therefore interested in two discourses of literacy that may be found in classrooms. The first is the dominant school literacy, which I describe drawing on Foucault’s work on discipline. The second is the children’s peer culture literacy, which I describe using Corsaro’s work on ‘interpretive reproduction’. Foucault’s work on discipline (1977), can help describe how school procedures are deployed in classroom in ways that enable discourses of school literacy to act on young children’s literacy practices (cf Luke 1992, Manyak 2004, Dixon 2011). Of particular interest in this article are school procedures of observation and assessment – which Foucault termed ‘surveillance’ and ‘examination’ (Foucault 1977). Corsaro’s theorisation of ‘interpretive reproduction’ (Corsaro 2015) emphasises young children’s production of peer cultures, within which children reproduce and share their own cultural practices. In this article I offer examples of children’s in-class cultural practices which enable them to operate within the dominant discourses of school literacy without necessarily aligning with its values attitudes and beliefs. This work offers scope for firstly challenging the assumptions of dominant school discourses and secondly reconsidering the ways in which school procedures are deployed in the classroom.

Literacy in the social context of the classroom

From a Literacy as a Social Practice (hereafter LSP) perspective, literacy is strongly related to the social context – in this case that of schooling – in which it is found. This means that ‘...we would probably more appropriately refer to ‘literacies’ than any single literacy...’(Street 1984 p.8). The LSP concept of a ‘literacy practice’ is helpful here. As Barton and Hamilton (2000) explain:

‘...practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. This includes people’s awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy.’

[Barton, Hamilton 2000 p.7]

Thus literacy practices are contingent upon people’s values, attitudes and beliefs both about literacy and the social context in which they practise it. Thus, whilst schooled literacy is dominant in institutions of mass education (cf Barton 2007, Papen 2016); the diversity of participants in schooling, means that it is unlikely to be the only discourse of literacy found in the classroom. This phenomenon has been explored by LSP researchers who discuss the relationship between ‘official’ (that is – schooled) and ‘unofficial’ (such as peer group, family and media) literacies in classrooms (cf Dyson, 2003; Bourne 2001, 2002; Maybin 2007, 2013). The literacy skills and knowledge valued within schooled literacy remain an important part of children’s in-class literacy practices (cf Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener 2004; Barton 2007). However, from an LSP perspective, the children’s visible deployment of such skills is related to the meanings they assign to both to literacy and the social context in which

they are required to practise it. The social context of the classroom includes organisational practices and procedures that maintain the dominance of schooled literacy discourses. In this article, Foucault's work on discipline (Foucault 1977) helps to describe these practices and procedures.

Schooled Literacy and Foucault's 'disciplinary technologies'

Foucault offers a useful set of tools for understanding how the operation of discipline in institutions of modern nation states was intended to produce 'subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies' (Foucault 1977 p.138) The deployment of disciplinary technologies such as surveillance and examination brings discourses to act on human agents. The discourse that is of interest in this article is that of schooled literacy which is brought to act on young children's developing literacy practices in the ways I describe here.

Schooled literacy discourses include particular expectations for 'normal' children's literate behaviour. These expectations are outlined in policy documents; for example, in England the National Curriculum for English (DfE 2013) sets out a sequence for teaching literacy skills that is linked to the children's chronological ages. In schools, children are observed or, in Foucault's terms, placed under surveillance, to see what literacy skills and knowledge they are able to deploy. The information gathered through this surveillance is used to compare each child to the expectations for children's 'normal' literate behaviour at particular chronological ages. Thus 'surveillance' is part of an ongoing process of 'examining' young children in order to ensure their in-school literacy practices align with the normalised expectations of schooled literacy. The outcomes of such assessments inform subsequent pedagogical

interventions designed to bring the children's literacy practices into closer alignment with what is considered 'normal'. In this way, disciplinary technologies 'normalise' particular discourses – in this case the schooled discourse of what literacy is and what it means to be a literate child; and operate to produce 'docile' literate bodies that conform to schooled expectations. These technologies have been found by authors researching literacy teaching in a range of contexts: from elementary schooling in Australia (Luke 1992); to literacy intervention groups in the US (Manyak 2004); and early literacy teaching in South African elementary schools (Dixon 2011).

The operation of surveillance and examination in schooling is not a problem in itself. For example, in her discussion of the operation of these technologies in South African elementary schools, Dixon argues that '...the operation of disciplinary power is essential if South Africa is to create an environment of sound learning and teaching for all students....' (Dixon 2011 p.67). Her analysis of the operation of such technologies in elementary schools is concerned with how they might be made to operate more effectively to secure sound literacy teaching. However, the discourses normalised by the deployment of these technologies in systems of mass schooling is hotly debated – in particular the emphasis on assessing children's literacy competence by measuring their levels of literacy skills and knowledge. For example, in England much is written about the emphasis on phonics teaching in early literacy education (cf Goswami and Wyse 2008); and the appropriateness of the associated 'Phonics Screening Check' for young children at the end of Year 1 (Bradbury 2018). Further afield, Dyson argues that linear mapping of children's literacy development through '...orderly lists of literacy knowledge and know-how' (Dyson 2001 p.10) is insufficient to understand children's literacy practices (Dyson, 2001, 2006, 2010). In

this article, I argue that if schooled literacy discourses of what it means to be a literate child are overly narrow, the technologies of examination and surveillance can operate ineffectively to restrict educators' view of young children's literacy practices. To demonstrate this, I explore how young children incorporate their interpretations of surveillance and the examination into their in-class peer culture literacy practices.

Interpretive Reproduction and young children's peer cultures

Much valuable research is written about how adults in schools work within schooled discourses (for example, Ball 2003, Papen 2016, Keddie 2018). However comparatively little is known about how young children manage their encounter with the operation of disciplinary technologies in the classroom. Here, Corsaro's theorisation of 'interpretive reproduction' is helpful. Interpretive reproduction' is a process by which children reproduce cultural practices that are tailored to their current social priorities (Corsaro 1992, 2015). From this perspective, young children do not simply reproduce the practices they are taught by adults - in this case normalised literate behaviours - but adapt them in ways which incorporate the children's social priorities for successful participation their current social context – in this case the classroom. In this paper, I argue that young children incorporate the disciplinary technology of surveillance into the literacy practices that they interpretively reproduce in the classroom. Thus, they negotiate between their own and schooled priorities for successful engagement with schooled literacy tasks. I shall return to this point later in the paper, when I exemplify this process of interpretive reproduction through empirical data. For the moment, I turn to an account of the study from which this data was drawn.

Outline of the research

This paper draws on a UK PhD study which adopted an ethnographic approach to the collection and analysis of data in order to address the question ‘What do young children do when they encounter schooled literacy?’ The aim was to understand how children practised literacy in mainstream literacy lessons which were shaped and dominated by the assumptions of schooled literacy. Flewitt (2011) offers a summary of ethnographic principles that demonstrate how these can support research into young children’s encounter with schooled literacy:

‘...over-arching characteristics of ethnographic research include recognition that: 1) data should be drawn from ‘real world’ contexts; 2) both participant (emic) and researcher (etic) perspectives should be valued; and 3) meanings emerge in social and cultural contexts from the interwovenness of language, bodily movements, artefacts, images and technologies. ‘

[Flewitt 2011]

In accordance with such an approach, the research was carried out over thirty one-morning-a-week visits to the real world context of Amber Class, a Year 1 (5 - 6 years old) class in Oakwood Primary School in London. The school was described by OFSTED in 2009 as larger than average with three times the national average of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, half the pupils speaking a language in addition to English and twice the national average of pupils entitled to free school meals, a key indicator of ‘social disadvantage’ in English Primary schools. Ethical guidelines from Kings College, London were followed throughout the research process. The research aimed to build up a detailed picture of the children’s literacy

practices from a range of data sources. The data set contains almost 7 hours of video recordings and some 16 hours of audio recordings which comprise both classroom observations and interviews with the children. This digital data is accompanied by field notes, 588 photographs, copies of the children's written work as well as digital documents including the teachers' planning for literacy lessons.

Mayall (2000) notes, children perceive that '...a central characteristic of adults is that they have power over children...' (Mayall 2000 p.110). Thus, as the data below demonstrates, the children were cautious in what they chose to make available to observing adults. This paper focuses on how the children managed the surveillance of their teacher and other classroom adults, in particular those whom the children perceived to be able to examine their literacy competence. The children's concerns about adult surveillance seemed to relate more to the physical presence of teaching adults in the classroom than to the presence of recording devices. For example on occasions the video camera seemed to pick up covert behaviour and the children, whilst aware of the sound recorders, did not seem concerned about what they recorded.

Further advantages of recording devices were that they captured how the children responded to one another as individuals, revealing discursive practices that were not dependent on what the teacher said or did. For this reason I began my data analysis with the interactional digital data. I adopted a micro-analysis approach to examining key incidents (Rampton 2007), cross referencing with other data sources relating to the same incident. This process supported firstly the capture of young children's unfolding literacy practices and secondly, the compilation of an account of the

relationship of those practices to the complex social world in which they were produced. Through this process I aimed to make plausible inferences regarding the meanings emerging from the children's ongoing experience of being taught to read and write in school.

It is important to note two factors concerning the scope of the research. Firstly, it was not directly concerned with the intersections between factors such as the children's gender, social class, ethnicity or language backgrounds and their literacy practices. Although such factors certainly played a part in the children's reproduction of literacy practices (see for example Heath 1983; Gregory and Williams 2000; Bourne 2002; Gregory Long and Volk 2004; Maybin 2007), it is beyond the scope of this project to consider these in detail. Furthermore, the research focus was the children's practices rather than the teacher's pedagogical work and this emphasis contributed to the teacher's generous participation in the study. Adults offered informal helpful background information but were not formally interviewed as part of the study. For this reason it would be unfair to speculate on any aspect of the teacher's practice. It should be noted however that the teacher maintained positive relations with her class and their families throughout the school year. Lastly, the names of the participants in the study are pseudonyms and cannot be used to inform assumptions about their characteristics.

I now turn to discuss how Foucault's technologies of 'surveillance' and 'examination' operated in the 'real world' classroom context of Amber Class.

Amber Class children manage surveillance

In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977), Foucault described how ‘...a relation of surveillance ...is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching ... as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency (Foucault 1977 p.176). In Amber Class the surveillance of teaching adults was clearly visible to the children as an everyday part of their experience of schooling. For example, Amber classroom was arranged so that the teacher could observe the children at all times. If literacy lessons were not proceeding as planned, the teacher could call a halt to the children’s activities. Children regularly read out loud to listening adults who would intervene when they considered it necessary. Writing was carried out in workbooks that the teacher would mark, commenting on the extent to which the child had conformed to normalised writing practices. The skill of phonics received particular prominence in Amber Classroom. In line with English policy recommendations (cf Rose 2006, DfES 2006) the children were taught how phonemes (sounds in spoken words) correspond to graphemes (letters in written words) in English. Surveillance and the examination often concentrated on how far Amber Class’ children applied this knowledge to decoding words in reading and spelling words in writing.

Throughout the year the teacher observed the children’s literate behaviour, and compared it to the statements on assessment documents such as ‘Assessing Pupil Progress’ (DfE 2011). This comparison resulted in each child being assigned a ‘level’ of literacy development, which determined how they were grouped with other children; where they were seated in the classroom; and which adults worked with them. Thus the children in Amber Class practised literacy in a classroom where the

operation of surveillance and the examination were visible to them and shaped their everyday classroom experiences.

The data I collected in Amber Class demonstrated that the children incorporated their awareness of the operation of ongoing surveillance and examination into their literacy practices. This enabled them to emphasise normalised schooled expectations for those literacy practices to observing adults. For example, during a spelling test in November 2010 two children - Jessica and Dean - occasionally whispered together and Jessica was sometimes heard humming. Such practices are forbidden in schooled spelling tests which require individual, silent participation in order to facilitate the examination of each child's ability to spell a particular set of words. In this instance, the children's whispers successfully evaded adult surveillance. However, at one point in the lesson, as the teacher was addressing the whole group of children engaged in the spelling test, Jessica called across the class that she had a poster at home which had words and symbols on it that aligned with the school's phonics and maths teaching approaches. Jessica's interruption was rewarded by the teacher who described Jessica's poster as 'brilliant'.

This example demonstrates how Jessica in particular invited surveillance of behaviour that she considered to be approved of within schooling – her ownership of a poster which aligned with the school's teaching methods - whilst avoiding surveillance of behaviour that she considered to be disapproved of – whispering with a friend in a spelling test. This is not to say that Jessica did not value securing a high spelling test score; rather that this was not her only priority for participating in the spelling lesson. In this instance she also wanted to enjoy her conversation with Dean. In order to

manage the demands of schooling as well as her peer culture priorities, Jessica actively managed the teacher's surveillance.

Incidents like this suggest that Amber Class' children were able to work around the application of discipline in schooled literacy in order to present themselves as 'docile' bodies' (Foucault 1977 p.138) whenever they perceived themselves to be directly under the teacher's surveillance. This means that they drew on their interpretations of the social context of the classroom, which included the operation of disciplinary technologies and the priorities of their in-class peer culture, when reproducing in-school literacy practices. Here I return to the work of Corsaro to suggest that such behaviours can be understood using his theorisation of children as engaged in processes of 'interpretive reproduction'.

The interpretive reproduction of docility

Corsaro summarises 'interpretive reproduction' thus:

'The term interpretive captures innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society. Children produce and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns. *The term reproductive captures the idea that children are not simply internalising society and culture, but are also actively contributing to cultural production and change.* The term also implies that children are, by their very participation in society, constrained by the existing social structure and by social reproduction.'

[Corsaro 2000 p.92 my italics]

Jessica's participation in the schooled spelling lesson is an example of innovative and creative problem solving that incorporates: the literacy skills and knowledge valued within the schooled discourse of literacy; her awareness of the disciplinary technologies that maintain that discourse as dominant in the classroom; and her peer culture priorities for enjoying a conversation with a friend. The practice she reproduces is constrained by the schooled discourse of how to practise literacy – when under the teacher's surveillance she cannot publicly hold her conversation with Dean during a spelling test. However, this constraint does not necessarily mean she is internalising the schooled values that she publicly displays to the observing adult. Rather, she draws on her interpretation of this constraint to make a judgement concerning which aspects of her in-school social practices to make available to the teacher's surveillance. Thus, Jessica interpretively reproduces a literacy practice that enables her to negotiate between the schooled literacy discourse and her priorities for participating in her in-class peer culture.

Young children's peer cultures are an important part of 'interpretive reproduction'. In Corsaro's work children actively produce and participate in shared peer cultures in social interaction with each other in particular social spaces (Corsaro 1992 p.160). They interpretively reproduce practices within these peer cultures that enable them to manage their experiences of the social world. Corsaro suggests that once children '...recognise they have the ability to produce their own shared world...' they '...begin routinely to socialise each other, and inputs and experiences from the adult world are interpreted within the routines of an increasingly complex and autonomous peer culture' (Corsaro 1992, p.162). In this case, most of the children in Amber Class had been in the same Reception Class for their first year of compulsory schooling and

had moved into the Year 1 class together. This meant that they had engaged in the active production of their own in-class peer culture, within which they had developed values, attitudes and beliefs that enabled them to manage the experience of being taught to read and write in school. One such belief was the importance of making alignment with schooled values for literacy available to adult surveillance. In the example above, Jessica drew on this belief in deciding which aspects of her social practices to make public and which to conceal. In doing so, she presented herself as a docile literate subject of schooled literacy.

Presenting oneself as a docile literate subject

Making public displays of alignment with school-approved literate behaviour

Other children's public displays of alignment with schooled expectations for literacy offer further evidence of a shared peer culture belief in the importance of publicly aligning oneself with schooled values for literacy. For example: during a guided writing lesson in November 2010, Martin, Alison and Donna loudly commented on what they were doing as they composed sentences, particularly their use of phonic strategies to spell; in a March 2011 writing lesson Colin crossed the classroom to tell the teacher he had used a 'wow' word (descriptive adjective) in his writing; in April Ben interrupted the teacher's suggestion that a child making a Mother's day card draw a bunch of flowers, to say that he had already intended to do so; and in a literacy lesson in May, Meena told the teacher on three occasions how many lines of writing she had to complete. These incidents demonstrate how the children drew on a shared belief that in order to manage the experience of being taught to read and write in school, it was important to present oneself as a docile subject of schooled literacy.

Evading adult surveillance of less approved practices

However the following examples show that such displays of alignment did not necessarily mean the children were internalising schooled literacy. In this first example from a December lesson, two children – Daniella and Alison – anticipated adult surveillance as the teacher approached their table. They then adjusted their literacy practices to ensure that they presented themselves as docile literate subjects when the teacher arrived. Daniella and Alison were seated at a table with a third child – Sophia. They were working on a school-assigned task that involved producing lists of rhyming words and writing them down on a card with a pen. The children’s engagement with this task was interspersed with off-task gossip and efforts to find working pens. Daniella and Alison’s shared engagement with this activity did not extend to the third child at the table - Sophia – who seemed to concentrate on finding a working pen. However, the stretch of interaction below captures a change in their behaviour as Daniella and Alison anticipated the teacher’s approach:

- 1 Sophia: ((searching for a pen)) But I can't even (do the)
writ[ing
- 2 Alison: [Quick before she's finished
- 3 Daniella: Sophia she's not (gonna be)-
- 4 no
- 5 she's not gonna be proud of you
- 6 'cos your not (^^^)

7 you didn't do nothing.

8 [She's not gonna be proud of you.

9 Alison: [What else can I write] ((She is heard repeating this
10 several times))

11 Daniella: Quick

12 Do something

13 Alison: [What else can I write

14 Sophia: [(^^^^ don't know any) things that rhymes

15 Daniella: hit

16 [hit

17 Alison: [hit

18 Alison: (her for)

19 hit

20 hit

21 Daniella: /h/ /i/ /t/

22 Sophia: /huh/ /i/ /tuh/

23 ((The teacher joins the table))

24 Teacher: Well done, well done with these rhyming words

25 ((The teacher leaves the table))

26 ?: (she's proud of us. We're gonna be d- finish it)

27 Sophia: Yes, she didn't see

28 Can I do more more more

This change in behaviour can be attributed to the Alison and Daniella's anticipation of coming within the teacher's field of surveillance. Alison interrupted Sophia's complaint about her pen not working at line (1) to suggest Sophia work quickly before 'she' is finished (2). 'She' was the teacher who had been engaged in working with a reading group elsewhere in the classroom. Alison's concern about the teacher being 'finished' refers to the possibility of the teacher finishing reading with this group and beginning to circulate the classroom, checking the work of the other groups. Daniella then explained that Sophia had not written anything on her card and was thus at risk of the teacher not being 'proud' of her ((4) - (8)). Alison appeared to return to her own work (9), perhaps to ensure that she had enough evidence of on-task behaviour, but Daniella instructed Sophia to 'do something' – presumably produce more rhyming words in accordance with the schooled intention for the task ((11) and (12)). As Sophia could not think of anything (14), Daniella and then Alison supplied her with a word and a spelling ((15) – (22)). After this, the teacher joined the table and rewarded the children with praise for their work, before moving on ((23) - (25)). Following this either Daniella or Alison seemed to express satisfaction at the outcome (26). Sophia also expressed relief (27).

In this example, both Daniella and Alison were aware of the teacher's movements around the room, anticipating her coming to their table before she did so. This awareness enabled them to pursue in-class peer culture priorities until they perceived a risk of coming within the teacher's field of surveillance. By the time the teacher

reached the table, the children were able to present themselves as docile subjects who complied with schooled expectations for the literacy task. Thus Daniella, Alison and Sophia reproduced a shared social practice that successfully suggested docile alignment with schooled expectations without actually becoming entirely docile subjects.

These examples demonstrate that Amber Class children's interpretive reproduction of literacy practices incorporated their interpretation of schooled discourses. Two aspects of this process are significant. Firstly, the children, particularly Daniella and Alison, shared an understanding of schooled expectations of appropriate literate behaviour for young children; and secondly, they were aware of how the adult operation of surveillance maintained those expectations in their classroom. The children drew on these interpretations to manage adult surveillance by publicly aligning with schooled expectations for the 'docile' literate child when it was deemed expedient to do so. Furthermore, Daniella's explanation to Sophia that 'she's not gonna be proud of you' (line 8, above) and her clear instructions as to what Sophia should do could be seen as part of a process of ensuring Sophia was socialised into this in-class peer culture practice (cf Corsaro 1992, above).

This presents a problem for schooled literacy's examinations of children's literacy competence. Maddock (2006) reminds us that adult perspectives on children's learning can obscure their view of the qualities and attributes of those children. In many educational contexts, adult examinations of children's literacy learning focus on the acquisition and application of 'literacy skills', as they do in the current English end of key stage assessments (STA 2017). However, this data suggests that children

can present to adults what they think those adults want to see. If adult surveillance focuses on the deployment of specific types of literacy skills and knowledge, then this is what children may show them. It is therefore possible that other aspects of young children's engagement with schooled literacy may not be made available to adult surveillance. However these other aspects of children's literacy practices may be valuable and helpful ways of practising literacy. The following examples illustrate this point.

Saira and Veronica sequence the 'Bear Hunt'

In this lesson on the 11th March, the schooled expectation was that the children could decide on an animal to write about the following day and to 'think of describing words (adjectives)...' to describe it' (teachers' planning March 2011). This expectation had been made clear to the children. In the incident discussed below, Saira and Veronica had both already completed the worksheet related to this task. They had then turned their attention to reviewing the task that Saira had completed the previous week, 4th March. This means they were working outside schooled expectations for their behaviour in the lesson. The children did not appear to pay my researcher surveillance any attention during the short section of video that I captured. However, as the incident below demonstrates, they did appear concerned about being observed by the two teaching adults who were circulating around the classroom.

The work that the children were reviewing had involved sequencing a set of pictures from the Michael Rosen book 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' (Rosen and Oxenbury 1993). During the story a family go hunting for a bear, encountering several obstacles on the way: grass, a river, mud, a forest, and a snowstorm, before finding the bear in a

cave. The aim of the picture sequencing activity was to order the set of pictures relating to the encounter to match that of the original book. However, as Veronica and Saira looked at Saira's picture sequence, Veronica spotted an error:

1 Veronica: You forgot something

2 Saira: What

3 Veronica: Number one

4 Saira: *Hitting different parts of Saira's open workbook with*
5 *a pencil*

6 Cave forest and snowstorm

7 *((These are locations in the story of 'We're Going on*
8 *a Bear Hunt'))*

9 Veronica: It's not in order

10 *both children look at Saira's workbook*

11 *Saira indicates the workbook with her pencil*

12 Saira: this goes there

13 this goes there

14 Veronica: No

15 Saira: *Hitting parts of the book with her pencil*

16 (It's got) tick tick tick tick tick

17 Veronica: (Dot dot dot) *she points to different parts of the*
18 *workbook*

19 Saira: Tick tick tick tick

20 *an adult passes close by and Saira flicks the page*
21 *over (Fig. 1), so the children are now looking at a*
 different page of Saira's workbook

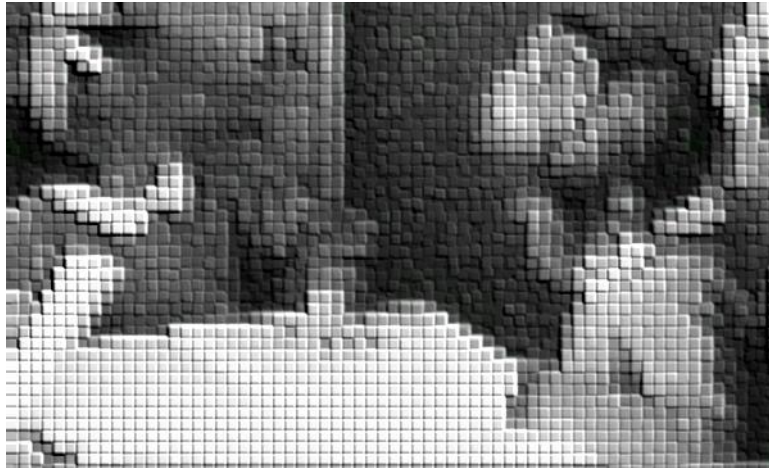


Figure 1: Saira flicks the page over as an adult passes by

In this instance, Veronica's spotting of an error (line 1 - 3) led to both children discussing whether or not Saira's work represented a faithful ordering of the original story (9 - 14). To do so they engaged in relatively sophisticated literacy practice. Both children drew on evidence to support their argument about the appropriate order of the pictures. Veronica indicated in Saira's book the order she thought the pictures should take (17 - 18), drawing on her understanding of the story. Saira drew on the authority of the teacher to support her point, indicating the ticks that the teacher had added when the story ordering was marked or, in Foucault's terms *examined* (15 - 16 and 19). Thus, in social interaction, the children collectively reproduced a literacy practice, drawing on firstly their recollections of the story, as emphasised in the schooled activity of the week before; and secondly the authority of the teacher as an examiner of children's literacy practices. However this complex practice was

deliberately concealed from teaching adults. At lines 20 – 21 an adult passed close to the children. At this point Saira flicked the page over, looked up at the adult and smiled (Fig. 1). In doing so, she presented herself as a docile literate subject, engaged in meeting adult expectations for the current literacy lesson.

In this instance, the children deliberately withheld aspects of their literacy practices, that they perceived to lie outside schooled expectations, from the surveillance of teaching adults. These hidden aspects showed how the children were motivated and engaged by the text. Their literacy practices took place in social interaction which included carefully evidenced negotiations base on both the teacher's examination of Saira's sequenced work; and evidence derived from two texts – Saira's work and Veronica's recollection of the story of 'We're going on a Bear Hunt'. This suggests that schooled technologies of surveillance and examination may not always act to constrain children's literacy practices. However they may act to constrain which aspects of those literacy practices adults are able to see. The example below illustrates this further.

Colin's spelling strategies

This final example concerns Colin's deliberate presentation of school expected strategies for spelling to adult surveillance when he had found an alternative spelling strategy more helpful in his work. In this February lesson, the children had written about a 'Victorians' day' which they had recently experienced in school. The children's texts were completed independently and in silence to ensure that their individual competency in writing could be examined. Each child's spelling competence would be judged according to the inclusion of a '...sufficient number of

recognisable words for writing to be readable...’ (DfE 2011). Furthermore, just as in the present English National Curriculum, the children were expected to ‘...spell new words using phonics as the prime approach...’ (DfES 2006 p.50).

As Colin wrote, he frequently referred to a display on the wall (Fig 2, below) which contained the standard spellings of words related to the topic of the writing, copying several of these words into his own writing in order to achieve ‘correct’ spelling.

As Colin writes, he frequently looks up at the Victorian display which is directly in front of him...

[Fieldnotes]

...Colin refers to the word wall of Victorian objects on the big double doors behind him

[Fieldnotes]



Figure 2: The words ‘mangle’ and ‘Victorian’ are on the bottom left of the display

After the lesson, I (Lucy) asked Colin how he had spelt the words in his finished text, which included standard spellings of ‘Victorian’ and ‘mangle’. In his replies Colin did not refer to his use of the display, instead saying firstly that he had ‘learned’ or ‘practised’ the words ‘at home’ in order to spell the word ‘Victorian’. Later in the

interview Colin claimed to have used ‘sounding out’ to spell the word ‘mangle’. I note that another child, Sharon, was also present during the interview:

- 1 Lucy: how did you know how to spell mangle
- 2 Sharon: [(What's a mangle)]
- 3 Colin: [With my sounding out
- 4 Lucy: Oh you sounded that one out
- 5 So you sounded out as M A N G L E
- 6 Colin Yeah
- 7 Lucy: I see

In the interview, Colin deliberately displayed spelling strategies that aligned with schooled expectations - those of learning spellings at home (the children were encouraged to use this method to prepare for their weekly spelling test) and using phonics to ‘sound out’ spellings. However he had actually achieved ‘correct’ spellings by copying words from a freely available classroom display. Thus, he withheld this valued and helpful spelling strategy from adult surveillance whilst publicly displaying alignment with preferred school strategies. This phenomenon occurs elsewhere in my data. For example, in February 2011, Dean was observed using a range of useful strategies for spelling in order to write a text, including asking other children for help. However, when working with his teacher seated beside him, Dean used only a phonics strategy to spell. Once the teacher moved away, Dean returned to his preferred strategy of asking other children for help.

Incidents such as these are significant given the policy and pedagogical emphasis on young children using phonics to spell in England (cf DfES 2006; DfE 2013). They suggest that the children are able to draw on a range of helpful spelling strategies. However their interpretation of schooled expectations mean that these alternative strategies are not emphasised to surveilling adults. This means that the scope of adult surveillance in classrooms is limited by its emphasis on particular approaches to spelling, constraining adult understanding of what children actually helpful when attempting standard spellings.

Conclusion

The examples in this article demonstrate that Amber Class children were aware of the operation of disciplinary technologies in their classroom; made their own interpretation of the expectations that these technologies brought to bear upon their literacy practices; and adjusted those literacy practices accordingly. In doing so they interpretively reproduced docility, presenting themselves as docile subjects of schooled literacy without necessarily accepting its assumptions about what is best for young children practising literacy in classrooms. Evidence from other studies suggests that such behaviour is not confined to Amber Classroom. For example, Dixon (2011) observed a schooled reading activity in a South African elementary school. During this reading activity the children displayed the school required phonic skills even though a number of reasons made the use of phonics problematic for them. In a further example, Corsaro and Nelson (2003) describe how a child in an Italian elementary school drew a picture for her schooled writing task on a tissue with a felt pen, an implement forbidden in her school. This tissue could be concealed quickly should anyone be watching her (Corsaro and Nelson 2003). In this case, the child had

found a way of using her preferred drawing implement whilst giving the appearance of aligning with the expectations of teaching adults. Instances such as this suggest that children do not necessarily become ‘docile’ subjects of schooled literacy. Rather they learn to manage institutional experiences in ways that enable them to give the appearance of aligning with dominant discourses whilst pursuing their own priorities.

In England at present, as in many systems across the globe, the examination of young children’s literacy practices focuses on their acquisition and application of literacy skills and knowledge. The evidence in this article suggests that this is only a small part of what young children do to manage their experience of being taught to read and write in the classroom. However the narrow focus of the dominant discourses of schooled literacy may effectively obscure educators’ views of these more complex practices, both in terms of what those educators’ look for when they examine young children, and what those young children make available for them to see. For example, in an example above, Saira and Veronica’s completed worksheets would be examined as evidence of their literacy capabilities whilst the complex process that they had jointly engaged in to review Saira’s work was missed. The problem is that adults focus their surveillance on normalised expectations for what adults think children should do, rather than what children are actually doing in the classroom. Dixon argues that the effective operation of disciplinary technologies can support the creation of a ‘sound environment of teaching and learning’ (Dixon 2011 p.67). The evidence presented here suggests that these technologies may operate more effectively if they were informed by a wider view of how children practise literacy in the classroom.

A further potential risk of the children's ability to manage surveillance is that they may abandon valuable practices of literacy in favour of aligning with normalised schooled expectations. Instead of interpretively reproducing docility, they may become docile. For example, Saira and Veronica engaged in a relatively sophisticated practice of reviewing a text and Colin was able to make good use of classroom display to support his spelling. A concern is whether the children will continue to develop such meaningful and helpful aspects of their literacy practices if they perceive that they are not expected within schooled discourses. This raises the question of the potential effects of constraining children's literacy practices within overly narrow expectations. In working to conform to these expectations, children's literacy practices may narrow in ways that restrict their ability to engage with more complex literacy tasks in the later years of schooling and beyond. To avoid this potential effect, schools could adopt open minded, flexible and adaptable discourses of literacy and young children in order to more fully understand how children engage with being taught to read and write in school.

I suggest that one way of widening adults' views of children's literacy practices is to adopt a Literacy as a Social Practice (Street 1984) approach, as I have done here, to exploring young children's engagement with schooled literacy tasks. This approach is enhanced by Corsaro's theory of 'interpretive reproduction' (Corsaro 2005, 2011) which offers a way of understanding how young children reproduce literacy practices in the classroom. When these theoretical lenses inform surveillance, as they have done in this article, the complex social processes within which literacy skills and knowledge are deployed become apparent. A focus on these creative processes reveals motivated children, actively engaged in ongoing work to solve the problems

posed by being taught to read and write in the classroom. Much of this work is collective, as when Saira and Veronica reviewed Saira's text; Daniella, Alison and Sophia worked to make the teacher proud; Dean drew on the support of his peers; and Martin, Alison and Donna made a display of composing sentences. These active, creative and collective processes have potential for supporting young children's literacy development. This is not to suggest that young children's peer culture practices of literacy are always ideal. However, if more is understood about their engagement in such practices, then literacy educators might be better able to design curricula that realises the potential of the ways in which young children engage in cultural reproduction and change within their in-class peer cultures.

Acknowledgements: With thanks to Dr. Mili, Dr. Sarah Leonard, and the University of Roehampton School of Education writing support group for their help in preparing this paper. I am especially grateful to Roxy Harris and Brian Street for their support throughout the PhD study upon which this manuscript draws.

References

- Ball, S. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.
- Barton, D. (2007). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language* (Second ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 7-15). London: Routledge.

- Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanic, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context*. London: Routledge.
- Bourne, J. (2001). Discourses and identities in a multi-lingual primary classroom. *Oxford Review of Education*, 27(1), 103-114.
- Bourne, J. (2002). Oh, what will miss say!: Constructing texts and identities in the discursive process of classroom writing. *Language and Education*, 16(2), 241-259.
- Bradbury, A., 2018. The Impact of the Phonics Screening Check in Grouping by Ability: A 'necessary evil' amid the policy storm. *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), pp. 539-556.
- Cook-Gumperz, J. (Ed.). (2006). *The social construction of literacy* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corsaro, W. (1992). Interpretive reproduction in children's peer cultures. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 55(2), 160-177.
- Corsaro, W. (2000). Early childhood education, children's peer cultures and the future of childhood. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 8(2), 89-102.
- Corsaro, W. (2015). *The sociology of childhood* (Fourth ed.). London: Sage.
- Corsaro, W., & Nelson, E. (2003). Children's collective activities and peer culture in early literacy in American and Italian preschools. *Sociology of Education*, 76(3), 209-227.
- DfE. (2011). *Writing assessment guidelines for levels 1 and 2*. Retrieved January, 2015, from

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110809101133/http://wsassets.s3.amazonaws.com/ws/nso/pdf/ac3aec7f9a6f74cf7dfc3cbea8a9127.pdf>

- DfE. (2013). *English programmes of study: Key stages 1 and 2; national curriculum in england*. Retrieved April, 2016, from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335186/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_English_220714.pdf
- DfES:. (2006). *Primary framework for literacy and mathematics* No. 02011-2006BOK-EN, DfES.
- Dixon, K. (2011). *Literacy, power and the schooled body: Learning in time and space*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dyson, A. (2001). Where are the childhoods in early childhood literacy? an exploration in outer (school) space. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 1(9), 9-39.
- Dyson, A. (2003). 'Welcome to the jam': Popular culture, school literacy, and the making of childhoods. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(3), 328-361.
- Dyson, A. (2006). On saying it right (write): "fix-its" in the foundations of learning to write. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 41(1), 8-42.
- Dyson, A. (2010). Writing childhoods under construction: Re-visioning 'copying' in early chldhood. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 10(1), 7-31.
- Flewitt, R. (2011). Bringing ethnography to a multimodal investigation of early literacy in a digital age. *Qualitative Research*, 11(3), 293-310.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish* (A. Sheridan Trans.). London: Penguin.

- Goswami, U. and Wyse, D., 2008. Synthetic Phonics and the Teaching of Reading. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(6), pp. 691-710.
- Gregory, E., Long, S., & Volk, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Many Pathways to Literacy: Young children learning with siblings, grandparents, peers and communities*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Gregory, E., & Williams, A. (2000). *City literacies: Learning to read across generations and cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Keddie, A. (2018). Supporting disadvantaged students in an English primary school: Matters of entrepreneurial and traditional professionalism. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 48(2), 197-212.
- Luke, A. (1992). The body literate: Discourse and inscription in early literacy training. *Linguistics and Education*, 4(1), 107-129.
- Maddock, M. (2006). Children's personal learning agendas at home. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(2), 153-169.
- Manyak, P. (2004). Literacy instruction, disciplinary practice, and diverse learners: A case study. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 4(1), 129-149.
- Mayall, B. (2000). Conversations with children, working with generational issues. In P. Christensen, & H. James (Eds.), *Research with children* (1st ed.,). London: Falmer Press.
- Maybin, J. (2007). Literacy under and over the desk: Oppositions and heterogeneity. *Language and Education*, 21(6), 515-530.

- Maybin, J. (2013). What counts as reading? PIRLS, EastEnders and the man on the flying trapeze. *Literacy*, 47(2), 59-66.
- Papen, U. (2016). *Literacy and education: Policy, practice and public opinion*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Purcell-Gates, V., Jacobson, J., & Degener, S. (2004). *Print literacy development: Uniting cognitive and social practice theories*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Rampton, B. (2007). The micro-analysis of interactional discourse in linguistic ethnography: An illustration focused on the job interview. *Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography, Language and Communication*, King's College, London.
- Rose, J. (2006). *Independent review of the teaching of early reading*. London: DfES Publications.
- Rosen, M., & Oxenbury, H. (1993). *We're going on a bear hunt*. London: Walker Books Ltd.
- STA. (2017). *Teacher assessment frameworks at the end of key stage 1: For use in the 2017 to 2018 academic year* No. STA/17/7956/e).
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647105/2017 to 2018 teacher assessment frameworks at the end of key stage 1 PDFA.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647105/2017_to_2018_teacher_assessment_frameworks_at_the_end_of_key_stage_1_PDFA.pdf): Standards and Testing Agency.
- Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B., & Street, J. (1995). The schooling of literacy. In B. Street (Ed.), *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education* (pp. 106-131)